DEBATES

LEVINSON *and* GOULD *continued*...

Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen (El Salvador); the Instituto de Historia de Nicaragua y de Centroamérica (Nicaragua); and the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores de Antropología Social (México). Video archives are now available for scholars and students at <archivomesoamericano.org>.

In summary, CLACS seeks to promote scholarship and outreach on issues of importance to a broad array of constituencies, both on campus and beyond. Budgetary constraints and guidelines, as well as disciplinary boundaries and the very definition of scholarship (e.g., tenure and promotion guidelines), can create divides that make this task quite difficult. In the midst of considerable success, we still must walk a long tightrope toward becoming a national resource center that produces and disseminates knowledge—for security and solidarity—that effectively reaches and edifies all of its potential constituencies. ■

The Revolution is Dead Viva la Revolución

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When the Mexican Revolution turned fifty, in 1960, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) still ruled in all its pomp, and the economic "miracle" was still going strong. The official commemorative volumes, *México: cincuenta años de revolución*, were upbeat and celebratory. They dwelt on the onward and upward progress of the revolutionary regime, the regime of what Howard Cline[1] called the "preferred" (that is, the stable, civilian, pro-business, industrializing) revolution, and said surprisingly little about the bloodshed and destruction that had preceded it.

Fifty years on, as we commemorate (but, perhaps, do not celebrate) the centenary of the Revolution, we do so in a different context: the PRI has lost national power, and, at least for two more years, the presidency is in the hands of a member of the National Action Party (PAN), a party born, in 1939, as a reaction to and a repudiation of the Mexican Revolution. For the PAN, the coincidental bicentenary of independence strikes a happier and more consensual note; it was, after all, initiated by a patriot-priest (whose bones President Calderón will not leave to rest in peace) and, except for a few reactionary *enragés*, emancipation from Spain and the forging of a new nation was, in the terminology of Sellar and Yeatman, a decidedly Good Thing. The Revolution is another matter. It may be a hundred years old but, like other revolutions (recall France in 1989), it can still stir partisan feelings.

Among historians, however, the partisanship is less pronounced than it was fifty years ago. There are still major disagreements but they are less clear-cut, and there are certain areas of general consensus. The most obvious point of consensus is that the Revolution had many facets. "Many Mexicos"—to quote again Lesley Byrd Simpson's much-cited phrase—produced "many revolutions." The official 1960 view of the Revolution as a mighty monolith, a solid bloc of popular, progressive, patriotic collective action, has given way to an intricate mosaic, above all, a geographical mosaic, which reflects the stark spatial complexity of Mexico in 1910: macro-regions (such as "the north"), states, micro-regions (La Laguna, Las Huastecas), municipalities, pueblos, even barrios.

Of the numerous relevant monographs, articles, and symposia one, in particular, deserves mention: Luis González's *Pueblo en vilo*, the pioneering *microhistoria* that many have sought to emulate but few, if any, have equalled.[2] Thus, regional and local historians have, over the last fifty years, made the biggest contribution to our better understanding of the Revolution (and, being a national historian with no historiographical *patria chica* of my own, I can make that claim with some degree of objectivity). Even thematic studies, e.g., of workers, women and peasants, or biographies of major, and minor, caudillos often necessarily adopt a regional or local stance: first, because the individual or collective actors were rooted in their regions and localities (Villa in Chihuahua/Durango, Cedillo in San Luis, Zapata in Morelos, Gabriel Barrios in the Sierra Norte de Puebla; labor insurgents in the textile factories of Atlixco or Orizaba; the stevedores, tenants and prostitutes who rallied behind Herón Proal in the port of Veracruz); and, second, because the kind of detailed research that the revolutionary mosaic demands can often be done best at the local or regional level. Older studies usually viewed workers and peasants as a kind of undifferentiated mass (so do a few recent ones, unfortunately); but the thrust of research in recent decades has involved greater discrimination, granting "subalterns" a diversity of motives, and striving, where possible, to delineate the "faces in the

crowd." Such an approach has also affected research on anti-revolutionary movements (such as the Cristeros); and, of course, it fits within a broader historiographical trend, evident worldwide.

If the monolith has become a mosaic, however, the question arises whether the mosaic makes a recognizable picture, or is no more than multicolored melange of individual *tesserae*. Certainly the old monolith of a progressive, popular revolution, directed against a tiny minority of Mexican and foreign exploiters has given way to more discriminating explanations, which (usually) avoid simplistic class labels, recognize regional and local diversity (including "non"- or "anti-revolutionary" regions, like Oaxaca or the Bajío), and which accept—in a way that official PRI discourse did not—that the Revolution was a fratricidal struggle in which many revolutionaries were killed by other revolutionaries. But, if the simple "social" interpretation of a popular uprising by workers and peasants is spent, what new interpretations are available? Some, in throwing out the old soapy bathwater of the "social" interpretation, manage to throw out the revolutionary baby as well. No revolution is left; it is simply a "great rebellion," as Ramón Ruiz[3] called it, unworthy to be mentioned in the same breath as the French or Russian Revolutions; or, as Macario Schettino[4] has recently stated, the revolution "never existed"—it was a discursive construct of Cardenismo.

But more often than not, I think, revisionism dissents (and often dissents intelligently and constructively) from the old social interpretation, and puts in its place a state-centered interpretation that stresses the Revolution's destruction of the old Porfirian regime and its creation of a new regime, ultimately more powerful and enduring (and, some would say, neo-Porfirian). We could call this the state-centered (or, in its more extreme form, statolatrous) interpretation; or we could term it Tocquevillean. As such, it again fits with scholarly trends elsewhere. It involves "bringing the state back in"; it echoes French historiography (from Tocqueville via Cochin to Furet: a genealogy that profoundly influenced François-Xavier Guerra); and it resonates with state-centered theories of revolution, such as Skocpol's.[5] The Tocquevillean turn does not deny that there was a revolution, but it sees the revolution as political (perhaps as forging a new "political culture") and has little time for class struggle and changing modes of production. In its more extreme form (and like all exciting new waves, it carried some over-enthusiastic surfers on to the rocks), statolatry created the image of a Leviathan state, which could crush and co-opt as it chose. It is hardly surprising such a depiction of the Mexican state— *el Leviatán en el zócalo*—should exert a strong appeal in the wake of the 1968 repression and the ballooning Federal budgets of the late 1970s. And there is no doubt that the victorious revolutionaries—the Sonorans in particular—were wedded to an ambitious state-building project, which, in the teeth of both domestic and foreign resistance, they carried through with considerable success. The revolutionary state clearly enjoyed greater social penetration and lasted longer than its personalist Porfirian predecessor.

However, the most recent macro-interpretative turn has questioned statolatry. Leviathan has been shown to have feet—or fins?—of clay. The revolutionary regime achieved some clear-cut successes: it survived, in the face of U.S. antagonism; it barred the Catholic Church from partisan politics; and it expropriated the Anglo-American oil companies. But it also had to compromise with a host of socio-political actors—regional elites, local caciques, military commanders, the Monterrey bourgeoisie. Catholics could not resurrect the briefly successful Partido Católico Nacional, but they could colonize the conservative wing of the National Revolutionary Party/Party of the Mexican Revolution (PNR/PRM), which was a broad church, capable also of accommodating radical worker and peasant movements, especially during the radical heyday of Cardenismo. As recent studies by Bantjes, Pansters, Fallaw and Smith, among others,[6] have shown, elites in Sonora, Puebla, Yucatán and Oaxaca could, like the Monterrey bourgeoisie, resist the radical thrust of Cardenismo and the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM). Cardenismo, as I have suggested, proved more a jalopy than a juggernaut. It was genuinely reformist (hence can be fairly seen as the last fling of the radical revolutionary generation); but, like all revolutionary administrations, it had to wheel and deal, compromise and concede. ("Negotiate" is the favored term these days, but it strikes me a little too cozy and consensual). Political outcomes, again displaying considerable regional and local variation, depended on a dialectic involving pressures from "the center" (under Cárdenas a radical center) and "the provinces." Temperamentally, Cárdenas was no Stalin, and institutionally the PRM—despite its impressive corporatist façade—was no engine of totalitarian rule.

If Cardenismo was the "last fling," it follows that the revolution did not last beyond the 1940s. This is a traditional view, eloquently expressed at the time by perceptive observers like Jesús Silva Herzog and Daniel Cosío Villegas. But traditional views can be correct. The Mexican Revolution never experienced a clear-cut counter-revolution (Huerta tried and failed in 1913-14); there was no sudden Thermidor, no military intervention, such as Bolivia's MNR suffered in 1964. Again, the institutional bases of the

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regime proved solid. But, from the time of Alemán (if not before), a new generation took power and, on the same bases, set about building a new national project: civilian, industrializing, urbanizing, anti-Communist, anti-anticlerical, pro-business, pro-Cold War and pro-American.

The oxymoronic PRI, born in 1946, was to be much more institutional than it was revolutionary. The rhetoric of revolution was maintained; indeed, the barrage of images, icons, murals, slogans, and textbooks grew in volume, even if, to repeat the comparison, this was no totalitarian project, and, given the growing strength of the private sector and the enduring influence of a non-partisan Catholic Church, Mexico remained culturally plural and diverse. Cantinflas would not have been permitted in Stalin's Russia. Mexican repression of dissent, though real enough, tended to be discreet and evasive. Compared to the "bureaucratic-authoritarian" regimes of the Southern Cone, shouting their national security doctrine and their defence of Christian civilization from the rooftops of Buenos Aires and Santiago, Mexico's civilian, "inclusive-authoritarian" regime seemed mild and respectable; again, a "preferred" sort of regime. Meanwhile, revolutionary rhetoric was occasionally backed up by reformist action: bouts of land reform, which sustained rural clientelism and (notably under Echeverría) burnished the dull "revolutionary" reputation of the regime. Most clearly—and, again, Echeverría is the best example—a progressive foreign policy (over Cuba, the UN, the Middle East, and South America) compensated somewhat for domestic conservatism.

Mexicans lived in a schizoid political culture: they were aware of the gap that separated rhetoric and reality; they endorsed, in many cases, the democratic and reformist goals of the Revolution; but they took a cynical view of *políticos* whose policies (and private peculation) contradicted those goals. Most, if not all, national political cultures display such contrasts (between what Jim Scott calls the "public" and the "hidden" transcripts),[7] even in so-called consolidated democracies; Mexico was unusual in that the contrast was large and enduring, and, rather like the "workers' democracies" of Eastern Europe, involved a decidedly radical public transcript, one to which reformers and popular groups could appeal. Thus, over time, the discourse of the Revolution—and the images of, say, Zapata and Cárdenas—were wrested from the PRI and turned into the discursive weapons of the opposition: insurgent labor unions, protesting peasants, dissident students and, by the 1990s, a new more radical movement for Indian rights.

It has been suggested that the PRI's belated, and partial, abandonment of revolutionary discourse in the 1980s and '90s helped bring about its fall from power in 2000. In repudiating revolutionary nationalism, embracing the Washington consensus, and, in the case of Carlos Salinas, seeking historical legitimation in the ersatz doctrine of "social liberalism," the regime cut its ideological moorings and, eventually, drifted to electoral defeat. There may be something in this, but not a lot. The regime of the PRI was sustained not by historical allusions and deft use of iconography; it depended on a ruthless but effective political machine, and reasonably successful economic policies, which, for some thirty years, managed to combine steady growth and low inflation. Mexicans were well aware of the regime's discursive hypocrisy; but while jobs were available and families could expect some modest betterment, the appeal of the opposition was limited. And, as Stevenson and Seligson[8] have argued, the memory of a distant but bloody revolution induced caution: social peace was valued, violence and rabble-rousing were not. Look at the rest of Latin America during the decades of the Pax PRIísta. As late as 1994, when the PRI seemed on the ropes, the *voto miedo* came to the rescue of Ernesto Zedillo. Thus, I do not think that Salinas's abandonment of revolutionary legitimation brought about the PRI's downfall. Salinas, after all, was a popular president; his promise of North American integration and First World status—a quite different brand of neoliberal legitimation—appealed to many Mexicans. Rather, the PRI failed because it could not live up to its new legitimation: it gravely mismanaged the economy and, in 1994-5, the country entered its third major economic crisis in a dozen or so years. The mirage of First World membership dissolved; and in 2000, Mexican voters turned, not to the neo-Cardenista and neo-Zapatista heirs of the old revolutionary cause, but to an ex-Coca Cola executive, the standard-bearer of the anti-revolutionary PAN. Even more surprisingly, they made a similar choice (just) in 2006.

This does not mean that the Revolution is dead and buried. It lives on, not just in the plethora of academic events scheduled for this centenary year, but as part of Mexicans' collective memory. Of course, it is no longer a direct, personal memory; it is mediated through three generations of rhetoric, images, textbooks, and films. Nor is it a monolithic memory, since the old fissures—left and right, anticlerical and Catholic—are still apparent (indeed, church-state friction seems to be on the increase right now). The Revolution may be safely consigned to history and to the earnest debates of specialist historians previously mentioned, but it retains some contemporary political relevance: not as a blueprint for the future (the notion that 2010 will produce a revolution because 1910 and 1810 did is, of course, a "hectohistorical" delusion), but as

a source of historical example and inspiration. Cardenismo acquired a fresh cachet after 1988; Zapatismo revived after 1994. Even the PAN can trade on its Maderista heritage (both personal and ideological). The Revolution may be history, a long-dead corpse for historians to continue dissecting, but some of the revolutionary DNA lives on, coursing through the Mexican body politic.

Endnotes

[1] Howard F. Cline, "Mexico: A Matured Latin American Revolution," in Stanley R. Ross, ed., *Is the Mexican Revolution Dead?* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1975).

[2] Luis González y González, *Pueblo en vilo. Microhistoria de San José de Gracia* (México: El Colegio de México, 1968).

[3] Ramón E. Ruiz, *The Great Rebellion: México, 1905-24* (New York: Norton, 1980).

[4] Macario Schettino, *Cien años de confusión. México en el siglo XX* (México: Taurus, 2007), p. 13.

[5] Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[6] Adrian Bantjes, *As If Jesus Walked On Earth: Cardenismo, Sonora, and the Mexican Revolution* (Wilmington, Del. SR Books, 1998); Wil G. Pansters, *Politics and Power in Puebla: The Political History of a Mexican State, 1937-87* (Amsterdam: CEDLA, 1990); Ben Fallaw, *Cárdenas Compromised. The Failure of Reform in Postrevolutunary Yucatán* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Benjamin T. Smith, *Pistoleros and Popular Movements. The Politics of State Formation in Postrevolutionary Oaxaca* (Lincoln, Nebraska: 2009).

[7] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

[8] Linda S. Stevenson and Mitchell A. Seligson, "Fading Memories of the Revolution: Is Stability Eroding in Mexico?" In Roderic Ai Camp, ed., *Polling for Democracy. Public Opinion and Political Liberalization in Mexico* (Wilmington, Del.: SR Books, 1996). ■